Castlemaine Naturalist

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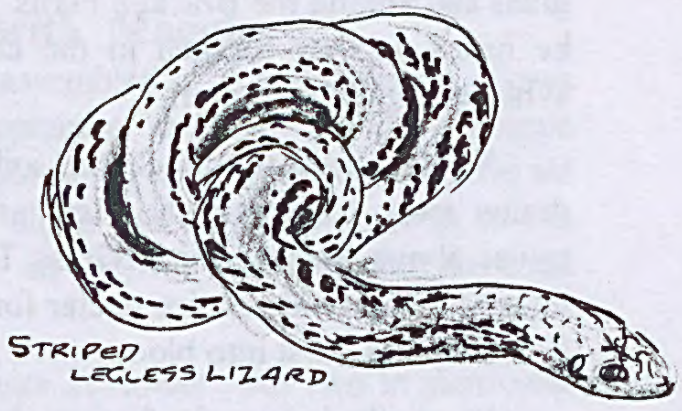

Carnarvon Gorge

During our winter rambling this year Brian and I visited Carnarvon Gorge in Queensland. After travelling through many kilometres of sparse, grey-green vegetation, then down an extremely rough track we arrived in a veritable oasis; a lost fertile valley. The track ended at the camping ground at the edge of the National Park, where, a new experience for us, we camped in a tent.

For the next five days we walked and walked, as this is the only way you can visit the gorge. We even tackled the 9.6km walk (one way - it was 9.6 km back again!). I was a little apprehensive. I knew I could make it one way, but I wasn't so sure about getting back again, but I did it, and it was very worthwhile.

Our constant companion while walking was Carnarvon Creek. The track criss-crossed it all the way along, and we were very thankful to the Park Rangers who had manoeuvred stepping stones into position for us to use. I didn't fall in once! These crossings were so natural looking and the surroundings were so wonderful one could have spent the whole day just sitting on a rock, taking it all in.

Green and fertile, the gorge floor gives life to River She-oaks and Weeping Bottlebrushes which flourish along the creek. We searched for Platypus and watched a White-faced Heron wading in the shallows, searching for its next meal. Above the creek banks, but still in moist and fertile conditions, grow Cabbage-tree Palms, tall eucalypts (such as Sydney Blue-gums), native hibiscus shrubs, native grasses and Sandpaper Figs, which get their name from their rough-to-the-touch leaves.

Unfortunately, along the track were clear evidences of the feral pig population which comes out at night, causing quite considerable damage.

The grassy, forested area offers food and nesting places for a variety of animals and birds. We saw kangaroos and a wallaby grazing on the long grass in the early morning. We saw little Fairy-wrens - Red-backed and Variegated - and Rufous-crowned Emu-wrens feeding on insects in the long

grass and among the Bracken Ferns. Above us at all times the lorikeets could be heard as they foraged in the canopy, along with Golden and Rufous Whistlers and honeyeaters.

Further from the creek the soil is thinner and more rocky, and water drains away more quickly. Here are Spotted Gums and Grey Gums that tower above Macrozamias, Grass Trees, native grasses and Bracken Fern. Grass-trees provide choice nectar for many birds and insects when their long flower spikes burst into bloom.

We walked along the Gorge where huge cliffs rose up on either side and many fern-filled side gorges, spectacular sandstone formations, ancient plants and special cultural sites met our gaze. Each day we investigated one of these gorges - the Moss Garden, with its walls dripping with water, supporting a prolific growth of ferns and mosses; Wards Canyon with its flourishing growth of mosses and the rare King Ferns; Hellhole Gorge where we searched its "fairy" rock pools for shrimps and other freshwater life; the Amphitheatre, where you have to climb a steep ladder and squeeze through a narrow rock crevice to a large chasm which has been carved out by water over aeons; the Art gallery and Cathedral Cave, which are significant aboriginal sites where there are hundreds of engravings, ochre stencils and freehand paintings. The last was our longest walk, but it was well worth it.

In the evenings we went out with the torch and managed to spot several possums and gliders in the tree tops, including one at two o'clock in the morning when I heard scuffling, and just *had* to get up to investigate!

Some of the around forty species of birds we saw in the Gorge were - White-winged Choughs, Black Ducks, Dusky Moorhen Whistling Kite, Wedgetailed Eagle, Little Falcon, Brush Turkeys, Sulphur-crested Cockatoos, King Parrots, Rainbow Lorikeets, beautiful Azure Kingfishers and Blue-winged Kookaburras. Some of the small birds were the wrens mentioned and White-browed Scrub-wrens, Weebills, which were fascinating to watch as they fed young, Brown Thornbills, Grey Fantails and Red-browed Finches. There were White-throated and Brown Treecreepers. The honeyeaters included Spiny-cheeked and Blue-faced Honeyeaters, Noisy Friarbirds and Noisy Miners. Apostle Birds regularly visited the tent and hunted around for anything that might have been dropped, but Pied Currawongs were very pushy and tried to take food from the table, raided the neighbours' rubbish bag to their great annoyance, and perched on a branch above our table - not the ideal situation for us! The BBBs (Big Black Birds) we gave up on, settling just for "crows" and "ravens"!

After five days we were very "footsore" and weary, but the Park really is a nature lover's paradise - an experience not to be forgotten.

Margaret Willis.

Terrick Terrick with Maggie

It was not a large expedition which assembled at the Eaglehawk Town Hall on Saturday morning, the 15th of September at 10.30 to follow Maggie to Terrick Terrick. However not to be put off by lack of numbers, off we set and, without even stopping for coffee along the way, we drew in to the Terrick picnic area shortly before noon, in time for a scramble up the rock before lunch.

There was not a great variety of plants in flower but two in particular were outstanding, both of them growing on the rock. The Snowy Mint Bush, *Prostanthera nivea* was quite spectacular growing out of crevices on the rock face, and covered in white blossoms, while the Nodding Blue Lily, *Stypandra glauca* with its deep blue flowers covered large areas of depression on the rock. Away from the rock itself there was not a lot in flower apart from some blossom on some of the Red Gums. Various birds were also interested in the Mint Bush, including wrens, honeyeaters and cuckoos.

On the way back to the picnic spot for lunch we were fortunate enough to spot a pair of Gilberts Whistlers (quite exciting even if the Dredges have one in their backyard, so I have been informed). During lunch we were entertained by the antics of the many Brown Treecreepers which frequent that spot. After lunch we went for a stroll away from the rock into what Maggie called the black & white area. Sure enough we were soon rewarded by the sight of a pair of Hooded Robins, followed shortly by 3 Red-capped Robins which circled around us making sure that we had an excellent view. What a delightful sight they make! As well as birds we observed a couple of Hares behaving in an erratic manner, chasing each other round the trees. It was then that I realised that they were behaving like March Hares except that of course being in the southern hemisphere they were in fact behaving like September Hares.

Back once again to the cars for afternoon tea before heading towards home, with some slight consternation when our leader took off on the wrong track. All was soon corrected however and the convoy headed off towards Dingee where, as custom demands, a stop was made for an icecream - very enjoyable as the day had turned out to be very pleasantly mild to warm. I will not bore you with a complete list of all the plants and birds which were seen, having mentioned what we considered to be the highlights. A very pleasant day altogether, a pity that there were only four of us there to enjoy it. Many thanks to Maggie for leading the expedition, and for taking the trouble to check it out earlier in the week.

George Broadway

Orchids from the Kimberly

Last year I received a letter from a friend in WA with an article from the West Australian, dated 12/2/00, telling of the discovery, made by botanists from Kings Park, in the Prince Regent river area of the Kimberly , of several different orchids, including one which grows under Spinifex and attracts pollinators by mimicking the scent of female wasps.

According to the plant science director, Kingsley Dixon, the Spinifex Orchid (*Arthrochilus* sp.) is a small green orchid, with up to 12 flowers, each about the size of a 10c coin. It grows to a height of about 30 cm. The party had noticed leaves they could not identify, and, on parting a clump of Spinifex that grew among the rock ledges discovered this unique orchid, the first that has been found growing in Spinifex. He commented that that is probably why it hasn't been found before - Spinifex not being the most friendly stuff to be poking around in!

Only two other related specimens were known, and those are from the Northern Territory.

The hinged lip of the Spinifex Orchid imitates the shape, colour and scent of a female wasp, so male wasps land on it. "The male then tries to fly off with the decoy female, but the lip is hinged in such a way that the wasp is lurched through 180° smack bang into all the pollen," Dr. Dixon told the paper. He also said that the Kimberly was one of the world's last botanical frontiers, but it was very difficult to get around the very rugged terrain.

Rita Mills

Observations

• Brenda Envall reported having found a dead Tawny Frogmouth, possibly a juvenile, in Kaweka while taking part in a working bee. There was no sign of how it had died; it didn't appear to have been attacked by a cat. Ern and Lesley Perkins have Kaweka as part of their Bird Atlassing area, but they had not seen them there before, though George Broadway says he has seen them on the nearby golf course.

• Brenda also has been hearing a male Pallid Cuckoo calling in Harcourt since the beginning of September. She also has had a pair of Eastern Rosellas flying around, and the White-faced Heron is back.

• George Broadway reported that at the end of August, in their garden in Wheeler Street, a Fantail Cuckoo was calling, and later, a Horsfields Bronze-cuckoo and Shining Bronze-cuckoo.

• Yellow-tailed Black Cockatoos - 30 seem to be resident in Kalimna Park. Maureen Dredge (also reported by Tony Morton)

- A flock has been roosting in Eucalypts at Little Bendigo for three weeks before the general meeting, and feeding in

the pines. they have also been cracking open the hakea nuts and feeding on the seeds. - Dough Ralph

- A large flock has also been seen in Fryerstown.

• Ken Dredge rang on Monday 17/9 to report a Gilberts Whistler in the garden next door. At first it was thought to be a Rufous Whistler, but the call was all wrong. When Ken finally saw it his suspicions were confirmed. He watched it foraging low down and on the ground for about half an hour, while it went through a whole series of calls.

• While working on her parents' property at Barkers Creek Natasha Harris found the dried remains of a Phascogale near their shed.

• John Turnbull is finding himself playing the part of educator to the two young kangaroos that he and Jacqui are raising. Both the buck (18months) and the doe (16 months) are play-fighting with him, then going for an exuberant hop around the yard and back to him. He says he feels like Grandfather being expected to play with a couple of very energetic grandchildren!

• George Broadway told of an experience related to him by the fellow from Daylesford who is helping them with fencing. Their helper was home sick, watching out the window, when he saw a feral cat come out of the bush and catch and kill one of the Blue Wrens, place it, bright feathers up, and sit back and pick off and eat the other wrens when they came to investigate. It finally ate its original victim.

• Doug Ralph reported a abundance of Sugar Gum seedlings in Kalimna Park.

• A written report from Lachlan Moody, our youngest club member, reads - "In August while photographing, a reptile expert found the nationally vulnerable Striped Legless Lizard *Delma impar* (18 - 25cms) on our property (at Redesdale). [It is] light grey brown with a series of darker punctuated longitudinal stripes along the sides of the body and tail. They are egg laying and vocalize. They feed on moths and insects, spiders and moth larvae."

• Chris Morris has had an Echidna, which has apparently taken up residence nearby, in his garden. It seems to be used to Chris being around as it made no attempt to dig down while he followed it around as it explored for ants.

• The Bluetongues at Broadway's have been sunning themselves on the rocks on the north side of the house.

• Fairy Martins have been gathering mud for bottle nests which they are building on the Steiner School. A Wedgetail seen at Harcourt. Brenda Envall.

• Recently in the Whipstick a Sand Monitor was seen by Ern and Lesley Perkins, but it quickly disappeared down a hole as they watched.

• On Lake Johanna 31/9, a Blue-billed Duck, Maureen and Ken Dredge. and on 1/10, six Hardheads, Rita Mills.

Wednesday Walks

Poverty Gully Track. 19/9. There were only three women on the first walk, led by Margaret Panter, but even so, they enjoyed each other's company and came back with quite a respectable list of plants in flower, including one or two that were just starting to flower. Penny Garnett contributes this list (I've added common names. Ed.) - *Acacia acinacea, A. aspera, A. genistifolia, A. longifolia* and A. *pycnantha* (Gold-dust, Rough, Spreading, Sallow and Golden Wattles), *Caladenia carnea* (Pink Fingers), *Cassinia arcuata* (Weeping Cassinia or Coffee Bush), *Chrysocephela semipaposum* (Clustered Everlasting), *Craspedia variabilis* (Billy Buttons), *Davisia ulicifolium* (Gorse Bitter-pea), *Diurus pardina* (Leopard Orchid), *Exocarpus cupressiformis* (Cherry Ballart), *Galium gaudichaudii* (Rough Bedstraw), *Hardenbergia violacea* (False Sarsparilla), *Hakea decurrens* (Bushy Needlewood), *Hypoxis pusilla* (Small Yellow-star), *Ozothamnus obcordatus* (Grey Everlasting), *Philotheca verrucosus* (Fairy Waxflower), *Pimilea linifolia* (Tall Riceflower), *Platylobium formosum* (Handsome Flat -pea), *Pterostylus melagramma* (Tall Greenhood), *Rhytidosporum procumbens* (White Marianth), *Senecio tenuiflorus* (Purple-leaf Groundsel), *Tetratheca cilliata* (Pink Bells), *Wurmbia diocia* (Early Nancy).

Haig's Road, Barkers Creek 26/9/01. On a lovely afternoon, cool, but mostly sunny, and after one or two getting lost etc., we had a most enjoyable hour. A lovely show of plants in flower, especially the Waxlip Orchids made up for all of our woes (the laughs and ribbing didn't suggest they were lasting. Geraldine is forgiven as it was her first role as leader - its only when we've been left behind for the third or fourth time that we get a little toey!).
A lot of the plants only had one or two flowers, but some, like the Hardenbergia violacea on the side of the track, were a mass of flowers.
List for the afternoon was - Gold-dust Wattle, *A. paradoxa* (Hedge Wattle), Pink Bells, Tall Riceflower, *Bracteantha viscosa* (Golden, or Sticky, Everlasting), Waxlip Orchid, Pink Fingers, *Caledenia phaeoclavia* (Clubbed Spider Orchid), *Microseris lanceolata* (Yam Daisy), *Indigophera australis* (Austral Indigo), Rough Bedstraw, *Arthropodium stricta* (Chocolate Lily.), *Stackhousia monogyna* (Candles), and *Amyema miquellii* (Box Mistletoe).

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING, 27/9/01

The Box/Ironbark report is out. It is very comprehensive, but the recommendation from the club is that as many as possible write to our politicians, as it is now up to Parliament to accept or reject the recommendations, in part or whole. Considering the amount of work the EEC has put in to the report over the past 6 years it was felt that theirs would be the most balanced view. Additions will be possible in later years to the conserved areas. We need to show our support, as there will be those with a vested interest who will be trying to have their say at this stage for

their own benefit. Something like that has happened to the idea of a Marine Park, which came to nothing.

It has been suggested that we have a **specimen table** again. In the past this has always been a source of interest and discussion.

Preliminary notice - **The BOCA Challenge Bird Count** is to be held on Sat. Dec. 1. More about that in the next CN.

Official launch of signs and brochures for Butterfly area of the gardens, on Fri., Nov. 2. Details available at the Oct. meeting, or ring the Secretary or E. Perkins - ph. numbers in Committee list, back page.

VFNCA March Campout - Preliminary notice of the campout hosted the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria over the long weekend has been received.

The Venue is Campaspe Downs Country Resort, on the Kyneton/Trentham road, 2km NE of Tylden.

Dates are the evening of Friday Mar 8 to lunchtime Monday Mar 11.

Costs -3 nights accommodation, meals and registration, $178 per head
Children over 2 years full rates.
Meals and registration only, $97 per head

Accommodation

Total accommodation at Campaspe Downs is 96 people. The **bunkhouse** provides accom. for 72 people occupying the lower bunks only. It would be helpful, however if some people offer to sleep in the upper bunks. Most rooms will sleep 6 people in the lower bunks. The adjacent toilet and ablution block is new and spacious.

There are also **some cabins** with en suite which are suitable as family units, also a limited number of double bed units and a few units with a bunk and two single beds. All linen, pillows and doonas are provided. BYO towels and personal toiletries. You are asked to indicate with whom you are willing to share a room.

Meals provided from Friday dinner to Monday lunch. Cooked breakfast and 2-course dinners will be provided and individually packed lunches to take on excursions. Supper available each night, self-service tea and coffee making available throughout the day.

Camping <u>not</u> available at Campaspe Downs. Nearest facility is Kyneton Caravan Park. Ph 5422 1612.

Full and half day excursions will be conducted led by local and invited Field Nats, including Ern Perkins and George Broadway.

Full excursion information is available from the club, along with the registration form, which includes accommodation booking and registration for meals only if preferred, and an excursion selection.

This form needs to be with -

Keith Marshall, Field Naturalists Club of Victoria, Locked Bag, Post Office, Blackburn. 3130, along with a cheque for **<u>deposit of $30 per person by Nov. 19.</u>** Cheques payable to 'FNCV March Campout'

PROGRAM

General Meetings are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00pm on the second Friday of each month, except January.

Excursions leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting. There are NO excursions on TOTAL FIRE BAN days. **Also note** that outdoor events are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions.

Business Meetings are held at 27 Doveton Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS

Wed. 10 - Last **Wednesday Walk** of the season with John Cole. Meet 27 Doveton St. 4pm.

Fri. Oct. 12. **Logging in Victoria** Speaker is Marcus Ward. 8pm UCA hall.

Sat Oct. 13 **Cobaw Forest.** Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30pm sharp.

Fri. 26 - Tue. 30 Oct. **VFNCA Campout at Hall's Gap.**

Fri. Nov. 9. **Farming with the Future in View**. Geraldine and Geoff Harris will tell us what they are doing for conservation and farming on their property at Barkers Creek.

Sat Nov. 10 A look around the **Harris Property**. Leave 23 Mostyn St. at 1.30 sharp. Take afternoon tea.

Fri Dec. 14 **Members and vistirors Night.** Your night to bring the club a short talk, a few slides, a book review, etc, etc. Start thinking. "Bring a plate" Christmas Supper.

Sat. Dec. 15 **Far-side of Cairn Curran** - excursion and picnic tea. Leave 13 Mostyn Street at **3.30pm.** Note time change.

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Articles for the Newsletter - If you are contributing articles for the Newsletter they can be left at Tonks Brothers or posted to RSD 181, 118 Blakeley Rd., Castlemaine, 3450. If you are sending it on a floppy disk - Lotus WordPro and Rich Text are best, Wordpad and Word for Windows 97 are useful. Ed.

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Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributor and not necessarily those of the club.

2001 Committee E. Perkins (President) ph 5472 3124, C. Morris (V.P. and Grievance Officer), G. Broadway (Sec.). ph. 5472 2513, J. Turnbull (treas.) ph. 5474 3005, R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), M. Dredge, M. Oliver, B. Maund, B. Envall.

Subscriptions for 2001 -

Ordinary Membership: Single ,$22 Family, $30 Pensioner or student: Single $19 Family $24 Supporting: $31 The subscription also covers postage of the 'Castlemaine Naturalist'.

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